

VZCZCXRO7042
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHUJA #2010/01 3071005
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031005Z NOV 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7404
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 2227
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002010

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, INR/AA, INL/AEE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [NI](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: AFRICAN UNION PEACE AND SECURITY MEETING REVIEWS
SITUATION IN DARFUR

REF: STATE 110957

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McAnulty
for reasons in Sections 1.4. (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The October 29 African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (PSC) meeting in Abuja reviewed the report of the AU High Level Panel on Darfur (AUPD), chaired by former South African President Thabo Mbeki. PSC participants called for reaffirmation of the AU's commitment to combat impunity, yet urged the UN Security Council (UNSC) to defer the International Criminal Court (ICC) process against Sudanese President Al-Bashir. They emphasized the need "for speedy progress in the search for peace, security, justice, and reconciliation in Darfur." Participants called for the creation of "inclusive and conducive" conditions to guarantee "free and fair" national elections in April 2010, as well as careful consideration of a self-determination referendum in Southern Sudan in 2011. The PSC Chair will submit quarterly reports on implementation of the AUPD recommendations. Nigerian President Yar'Adua presided over the entire proceedings, which lasted six to seven hours. U.S. Special Envoy Gration and staff will report separately on their closed-door meetings. END SUMMARY.

PARTICIPANTS

¶2. (SBU) In addition to former South African President Mbeki, other AUPD panel members included former Nigerian Head of State Abdulsalami Abubakar; former Burundi President Pierre Buyoya; and former State House Counsel and Special Envoy of former Nigerian President Obasanjo on the Trial of Suspects of War Crimes and Human Rights Violations in Darfur Alhaji Kabir Mohammed. Zambian Supreme Court Judge Florence Ndebele Mwachande Mumba and former Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher el-Sayed reportedly could not attend. Assembled leaders included Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Chadian President Idriss Deby, and Rwandan Prime Minister Bernard Makanda, among others.

SUDANESE PRESIDENT A "NO SHOW"

13. (U) The Sudanese delegation, headed by Vice President Ali Uthman Mohammed Taha, included Presidential Adviser Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin, who covers the Darfur portfolio. Taha remarked that Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, indicted in May by the ICC for war crimes, had planned to attend, but "due to some internal matters has not been able to come and participate." Taha opined that African issues and crises should be addressed "within our continent, as it knows best its problems and the ways and means to deal with them." He insisted that his country remained "committed to the principle of a comprehensive peace in Darfur." Taha criticized the international community and some "big powers" for embracing rebel groups who had refused to sign the 2006 Abuja accords.

14. (U) The Eritrean representative commented that the ICC indictment of Sudanese President Bashir "has not helped the situation" and that the Sudanese must "own both the process and the settlement" while discouraging "excessive internationalization" of the matter. The Qatar participant, noting his country's extensive involvement in the process as witnessed by the Doha Agreement, congratulated Nigeria on its new UN Security Council seat and lauded efforts by Libyan leader Muammar Ghaddafi and U.S. Special Envoy Gration in helping to mediate the conflict.

RHETORICAL "HIJACKING"

15. (SBU) At the morning session, representatives of PSC

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member states, the five Permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members (P-5), the Arab League, and others congratulated the AUPD for its work and expressed appreciation to Nigerian President Yar'Adua and his government for their hospitality to the PSC, in particular Qatar, for efforts to mediate in Sudan. They urged Sudanese factions to redouble efforts towards achieving a sustainable and peaceful resolution to the conflict and called for free and fair elections in 2010. While speakers had a theoretical limit of seven minutes or less, many well exceeded their allotted times. After two hours, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi interjected and lamented the time "hijacked" by unnecessary speeches. Meles added that speeches by "non-Africans" consumed time needed for more substantive, closed-door discussions and debate on Guinea and Niger, in addition to the AUPD report. (N.B.: The entire afternoon session remained closed to all non-PSC member countries, including the P-5, and journalists. Even Nigerian Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe waited outside the forum. End Note.)

16. (U) After the closed-door session, the AU PSC released communiques endorsing the AUPD report and its recommendations and reaffirming AU commitments to combat impunity, yet urging the UNSC to defer the ICC process against Sudanese President Al-Bashir in the interest of "reconciliation and justice." The PSC emphasized the need "for speedy progress in the search for peace, security, justice, and reconciliation in Darfur" and to "create inclusive and conducive conditions" for the holding of elections in Darfur and a self-determination referendum in Southern Sudan. The PSC Chairperson will submit quarterly reports on implementation of the AUPD recommendations.

17. (U) Separate AU PSC communiques addressed the situations in Guinea and Niger, as noted in reftels. U.S. Special Envoy General Gration held private meetings in Abuja on the margins of the AU PSC sessions with former South African President Mbeki, Sudanese Vice President Taha and Sudanese Presidential Adviser Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin, Chad President Deby, and Special Envoys for Sudan from the United Kingdom and the European Union. He later described such meetings as "very frank" and productive." Special Envoy Gration and his staff

will report separately on these closed-door meetings.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, who chaired the summit, stayed for six or seven hours -- an impressive feat for a person suffering from serious health issues. He did, however, look incredibly frail, and, as described by one observer, "skeletal."
SANDERS